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ABSTRACT

A study explored the effects of individualized, integrated language arts instruction on the attitudes of poor readers. A total of 63 elementary students participated in the study, 33 in the treatment group and 30 in the comparison group. Twice a week for a period of 12 weeks, the treatment group received reading instruction which incorporated listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities based on their interests and trade books; the comparison group received basal reading instruction. The Student Attitude Inventory was used as the pre- and post-measure. Results of groups-by-grade-level and groups-by-gender analyses of covariance using the attitude pre-measure as the covariate indicated a significant groups-by-grade-level interaction effect for self-perceptions as learners, a significant main effect for gender on the reading subarea, and a significant main effect for gender on total attitude scores. Treatment group students in the upper grades had higher self-perceptions as learners than did students in the lower grades, while comparison group students' self-perceptions were not affected. There were no significant effects on attitudes toward the subareas of listening, speaking, and writing. Findings suggest support for individualized instruction which includes the use of trade books related to students' interests in an integrated language arts approach. (Seventy references are attached.) (Author/RS)

Effects of Individualized, Integrated Language Arts Instruction on the Attitudes of Poor Readers

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Abstract

The study explored the effects of individualized, integrated language arts instruction on the attitudes of poor readers. A total of 63 elementary students participated in the study, 33 in the treatment group and 30 in the comparison group. Twice a week for a period of 12 weeks, the treatment group received reading instruction which incorporated listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities based on their interests and trade books; the comparison group received basal reading instruction.

The Student Attitude Inventory was used as the pre- and post-measure. Results of groups-by-grade-level and groups-by-gender analyses of covariance using the attitude pre-measure as the covariate indicated a significant ($p < .04$) groups-by-grade-level interaction effect for self-perceptions as learners, a significant ($p < .003$) main effect for gender on the reading subarea, and a significant ($p < .04$) main effect for gender on total attitude scores. Treatment group students in the upper grades had higher self-perceptions as learners than did students in the lower grades, while comparison group students' self-perceptions were not affected. There were no significant effects on attitudes toward the subareas of listening, speaking, and writing.

Effects of Individualized, Integrated Language Arts Instruction on the Attitudes of Poor Readers

Introduction

Although educators and researchers have acknowledged that students' attitudes toward learning and reading affect their academic performance, the need for additional research in this area remains strong (Boehnlein, 1987; Durkin, 1961; Forester, 1970; Holdaway, 1982; Hoskisson, 1979; Saracho, 1984; White, Vaughn, & Rorie, 1986; Wilson & Hall, 1972). It is not clear why the study of students' reading attitudes has been neglected by teachers and researchers because the two major goals of every reading program are (1) to teach students how to read, and (2) to make them want to read (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Chomsky, 1978; Cronbach, 1967; Cullinan, 1987; Eldredge & Butterfield, 1986; Fielding, Wilson, & Anderson, 1984; Huck, 1984; Tunnell, Calder, Justen, & Waldrop, 1988; Tunnell, Calder, & Phaup, 1992). The results of a survey of teachers in the southeastern region of the United States, conducted by Heathington and Alexander (1984), revealed that teachers viewed attitudes as an important factor but spent little time developing and maintaining positive attitudes toward reading.

For the purposes of this study, attitude is defined as a combination of feelings and behaviors related to a specific learning situation which serves as a major factor in the learner's receptivity to activities related to the learning situation. This definition is drawn from several reading researchers who have addressed affective components of reading and from psychologists who have addressed theoretical dimensions of attitude development (Ajzen & Fisnbein, 1980; Burnkrant & Bagozzi, 1979; Cothern & Collins, 1992; Fishbein &

Ajzen, 1975; Liska, 1984; Matthewson, 1976, 1985; Schlegel & DiTecco, 1982; Shaw & Wright, 1967). Attitudes are acquired (learned) gradually through multiple experiences with given events, situations, or ideas and are expressed as a behavioral by-product representing the individual's perceptions about the social/cultural expectations, or in some instances, the consequences associated with the given event, situation, or idea (Shaw & Wright, 1967).

In general, the relationship between reading attitudes and reading achievement has been supported by research (Alexander & Filler, 1976; Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1984; Casteel, 1989; Groff, 1962; Jacobinski & Nicholls, 1987; Morrow, 1987; Ransbury, 1973; Roettger, Szymczuk, & Millard, 1979; Russ, 1989). Students who read well usually exhibit more positive attitudes toward reading than do students who are categorized as poor readers. According to Lipson and Wixson (1991), attitudes toward reading and expectancies about reading performance become more negative with lack of success in reading. As attitudes become more negative, students put forth less effort which, in turn, produces a cyclic pattern of failure (Butkowsky & Willows, 1980; Dweck & Bempachat, 1983).

Among the most prominent factors which may affect the development of attitude toward learning are self-concept, school achievement, school and home environments, socio-economic status, teacher attitudes and behaviors, parental attitudes, gender, individual interests, instructional strategies, maturation, and intelligence. Summaries of the research examining the relationship between these factors and attitude development have been published by Alexander and Filler (1976) and, more recently, by Cothern and Collins (1992). Four of the factors, self-concept, gender, instructional strategies, and

individual interests, are particularly relevant to the study reported here.

Studies have indicated that there is a relationship between self-concept and attitude development. The attainment of established goals significantly affects the development of a positive self-concept (Groff, 1962; Midkiff, Burke, Hunt, & Ellison, 1986). A study by Scott and Miller (1986) found that goal seeking behavior was closely related to school performance and self-concept. Quandt (1972) reported a positive correlation between low attitude and low self-concept, with the correlation becoming stronger as students age. According to Alexander and Filler (1976), there are two important phenomena, counteraction and the spiraling process, present in studies of self-concept and attitude. Counteraction is the result of repeated negative experiences with reading, causing the learner to avoid the act of reading through refusal, disinterest, or lack of effort. The spiraling process, which may be applied to both proficient and poor readers, refers to behaviors associated with the act of reading which become increasingly extreme in either a positive or negative direction making it difficult to redirect behavior; counteraction and the spiraling process grow out of past experiences with reading.

The research examining the relationship between gender and reading attitudes remains inconclusive. Askov and Fishback (1973) concluded that female students had more positive attitudes toward reading than did male students. However, the results of previous studies were not in agreement with this conclusion; Denny and Weintraub (1966), who investigated the reading attitudes of first-grade students, and Hansen (1969), who studied the impact of the home literary environment on reading attitudes, concluded that

basically there were no differences between male and female students' attitudes toward reading.

Brophy (1988) studied the research on teacher effects and reported that teachers whose instructional delivery reflected holistic methods inevitably encouraged the development of independent interests which, in turn, produced positive attitudes toward learning. Other instructional practices which affect the development and maintenance of positive attitudes include having students imagine personal success, activating background knowledge through the use of questions, and questioning sessions designed to enhance comprehension (Collins & Cheek, 1989; Glazer and Searfoss, 1988; Jagacinski & Nicholls, 1987; Moffett, 1983; Ngandu, 1981; Rowe & Rayford, 1987).

Reading authorities agree that positive attitudinal changes are more likely to occur when reading selections are of interest to students (Cleworth, 1958; Estes & Vaughan, 1973; Healy, 1953; Lipson & Wixson, 1991; Mason & Au, 1990; Richek, List, & Lerner, 1989; Spache, 1974). According to Asher (1980), high interest in reading material results in a greater desire to read and increased comprehension. It was concluded by Anderson, Shirey, Wilson, and Fielding (1987) that interest in reading material is thirty times more powerful than readability in determining or predicting a student's ability to comprehend a passage.

The interaction between the reader and the reading context is enhanced when the selection interests the student, creating a strong sense of personal involvement with the textual material. The wide range of topics found in trade books and magazines written for young people makes it possible to locate reading selections that will be of interest to reluctant readers.

By using the student's interests to select reading materials and by providing holistic reading instruction which integrates the language arts areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing, teachers may be able to change the attitudes of poor readers (Brophy, 1988). An integrated approach to language arts instruction makes learning more personal by teaching language skills through application rather than in disconnected units (Walmsley and Walp, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the attitudes of poor readers could be improved through individualized instruction that included the use of trade books related to students' interests in an integrated approach to language arts instruction. The specific research questions addressed by the study were:

1) What are the effects of individualized instruction, which includes trade books and integrated language arts instruction, on the attitudes of poor readers toward the language arts areas and toward themselves as learners?

2) Are there grade level differences in the attitudes of poor readers toward the language arts areas and toward themselves as learners?

3) Are there gender differences in the attitudes of poor readers toward the language arts areas and toward themselves as learners?

4) Are the effects of individualized instruction, using an integrated language arts approach, the same across grade levels?

Methodology

Subjects

Two groups of students, all attending two public elementary schools (referred to as School A, which houses grades K-4, and School B, which houses

grades 5-7) located in the same town, were included in the study. The treatment and comparison groups were formed by asking classroom teachers of grades 2-6 in the two elementary schools to list the names of students in their classrooms who were having difficulties in reading, as reflected by consistently poor grades in reading; the names of 97 students were listed. From the list of 97 students, 63 were randomly selected and then randomly assigned to treatment and comparison groups, each group containing 33 and 30 students, respectively. The treatment group contained 13 males and 20 females, with 16 students enrolled in School A and 17 students enrolled in School B, and the comparison group contained 17 males and 13 females, with 16 students enrolled in School A and 14 students enrolled in School B. The distribution across grade levels for treatment (t) and comparison (c) groups was as follows: 2nd grade = 11 (t), 10 (c); 3rd grade = 4 (t), 5 (c); 4th grade = 1 (t), 1 (c); 5th grade = 10 (t), 9 (c); and 6th grade = 7 (t), 5 (c).

Instruments

The Student Attitude Inventory (SAI) was used as a pre- and post-test measure. Constructed by the researchers, the SAI contains 33 questions related to five areas: listening (7 items), speaking (7 items), reading (8 items), writing (6 items), and self-perceptions as learners (5 items). It may be administered individually or in a group setting, with respondents marking the face illustration that best represents their feelings at the end of each question. Five face illustrations are shown at the end of each question, ranging from a big smile to a big frown. Respondents are told that the face illustrations represent the following feelings: very happy, happy, neither happy nor sad, sad, and very sad. The SAI includes questions, such as

Listening: How do you feel when someone reads a story to you? How do you feel when your teacher tells you the steps to follow in an activity rather than having you read the steps? Speaking: How do you feel when someone asks you to tell about something that has happened to you or something that you have done? How do you feel when you are given the chance to tell someone about a story that you have read? Reading: How do you feel when you are asked to read written directions and the teacher does not explain them? How do you feel when you have the opportunity to read magazines? Writing: How do you feel when you are writing a note to a friend or parent and you do not know how to spell a word? How do you feel when your teacher asks you to write a story? Self-perceptions as Learners: How do you feel when you are asked to complete an assignment alone? How do you feel when you are asked to be the leader of a group activity?

A Likert scale, ranging from 5 to 1, is used to score the SAI with 5 representing "very happy" and 1 representing "very sad." Area scores on the SAI are obtained by summing the item responses in each of the five areas. The possible scores for Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Self-Perceptions as Learners are 35, 35, 40, 30, and 25, respectively. Summing the area scores produces a possible total score of 165. The researchers examined the internal consistency of the SAI and found that alpha coefficients for the area scores were as follows: .74 (Listening), .74 (Speaking), .82 (Reading), .77 (Writing), and .74 (Self-Perceptions as Learners), with .93 being the alpha coefficient for the overall (total) score. The validity of the SAI was examined by correlating the total scores obtained by a sample of 47 elementary students on the SAI with their total scores on the Elementary Reading Attitude

Survey (ERAS); the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient was .44 ($p < .002$).

An oral cloze test was administered at the beginning of the study to determine whether differences existed initially between the treatment and comparison groups in their abilities to meaningfully process oral language. The cloze test contained 9 sentences with deletions representing 3 categories: final, initial, and medial positions (i.e., 3 sentences per deletion category).

Instructional Materials

Treatment group. Reading materials for the treatment group included trade books, newspaper, and magazine articles offered in an integrated language arts lesson taught by preservice teachers. Based on the results of an interest inventory and other diagnostic information, the preservice teachers selected trade books and articles from newspapers and magazines that would likely interest their assigned students and planned integrated, language arts lessons around the content of the selected texts; comic books were selected for use with one student whose attitude toward reading was particularly negative.

The instructor of the reading practicum course required that each lesson include listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities related to the content of the text selection. For example, if the student were interested in learning about the ocean, the preservice teacher's lesson plan might contain the following activities: listening to the preservice teacher read a story about killer whales; having the student read a short excerpt from World Magazine about killer whales; asking the student to tell the preservice

teacher how it would feel to catch a killer whale; and, having the student write on a large sheet of paper, designed in the shape of a killer whale, his ideas about how it would feel to catch a killer whale. Each of the preservice teacher's lesson plans was examined by the course instructor prior to being implemented. Among the types of instructional strategies included in preservice teachers' lesson plans were: Directed-Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA), List-Group-Label (LGL), Request, and Direct Inquiry Activity (DIA).

As needed, skills instruction in reading was provided within the context of the text selection; sight word recognition/vocabulary building, structural analysis, and context analysis were the skills emphasized during instruction, with phonic analysis receiving very little attention because it tended to be emphasized in the basal reading programs used by the classroom teachers.

Comparison group. Reading materials for the comparison group included the text selections contained in the basal reading program taught by classroom teachers. Each reading lesson was teacher-directed and followed the typical directed-reading approach format. Classroom teachers reported that they provided students who were having difficulties in reading with 10-12 minutes of individualized reading instruction on a daily basis; the focus of the individualized instruction was on the development of decoding skills, such as sight word recognition, phonics, structural, and context analysis. In general, the classroom teachers did not integrate reading instruction with language arts instruction, although sometimes students were asked by teachers to write short answers to reading comprehension questions.

Procedures

In late August, treatment and comparison groups were formed by randomly

selecting 63 students from a list of 97 elementary students whose performance in reading was consistently poor and then randomly assigning them to the two groups; the 33 preservice teachers, who were enrolled in a reading practicum course, were randomly assigned to students in the treatment group to provide tutorial instruction in language arts areas.

The preservice teachers were all senior level, university students who had completed a total of 12 semester hours in reading instruction as a prerequisite to enrolling in the reading practicum class; also, the preservice teachers had either completed student teaching and were taking this practicum as the last requirement for graduation (n = 4) or only lacked student teaching for graduation (n = 29). Each preservice teacher worked with only one student.

As premeasures, students in both groups responded to the cloze test and the SAI which were administered by the preservice teachers to students, individually. Also, the preservice teachers administered several diagnostic instruments to their assigned students, including an interest inventory, an informal reading inventory, the Slosson Oral Reading Test, an informal phonics inventory, and a miscue analysis selection.

Students in the treatment group received individualized instruction by their assigned preservice teachers twice a week for 12 weeks, 50 minutes per session. The preservice teachers conducted the tutoring sessions at the schools during the same time period that reading instruction was taking place in the students' classrooms. Each preservice teacher was assigned a quiet location in the school building in which to work with her assigned student. On the days that students in the treatment group received instruction from the

preservice teacher, they were not required to participate in the regularly scheduled reading instruction conducted by their classroom teachers.

Each instructional session included listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities correlated with the content of the text (book, newspaper, or magazine article) serving as the topic of the lesson. Students charted their performance on a progress chart at the end of each session. Each progress chart was designed to reflect the personal interests of the individual student. For example, using the aforementioned scenario of the killer whale, if the student indicated during discussions that he/she particularly enjoyed learning about killer whales, then the preservice teacher would design a progress chart using the killer whale as the motif of the chart.

Students in the comparison group continued to receive basal reading instruction from their classroom teachers during the 12-week treatment period. Individualized instruction was provided on a daily basis to those students who needed extra assistance from the classroom teacher.

In December, the SAI was administered by the preservice teachers to students in the comparison and treatment groups, as a post-attitudinal measure.

Results

At the beginning of the study, the cloze test data were analyzed using *t*-tests to determine whether any differences existed initially between the treatment and comparison groups in their abilities to meaningfully process oral language. None of the *t*-tests (comparisons of means for final, initial, medial, and total cloze items) were significant.

Because of the small numbers representing each grade level, lower and upper level grades were combined for analyses; the lower grade level (labeled Level 1) included grades 2, 3, and 4, and the upper grade level (labeled Level 2) included grades 5 and 6. The decision was made to include grade 4 with grades 2 and 3 because the grade level structure of School A included grades K-4. The data were analyzed using analysis of covariance procedures, and the .05 level of significance was used for all analyses.

A two-way (groups-by-grade-level) analysis of covariance using the attitude pre-measure as the covariate was carried out for each of the dependent measures, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and self-perceptions as learners. A significant groups-by-grade-level interaction effect was found on the self-perceptions as learners subarea ($F[1,58] = 4.35$, $p < .04$), with the adjusted means being: lower grades (N = 16) treatment group M = 19.10; lower grades (N = 16) comparison group M = 20.73; upper grades (N = 17) treatment group M = 21.19; and, upper grades (N = 14) comparison group M = 19.82. Comparisons of the group means indicated that the mean of the treatment group in the lower grades differed significantly ($t = 2.1^{\wedge}$, $p < .05$) from the mean of the treatment group in the upper grades, but the other group means were not significantly different. Additionally, a groups-by-gender analysis of covariance yielded a significant gender effect on the reading subarea (female $M_{[adj]} = 32.63$, male $M_{[adj]} = 28.65$; $F[1,58] = 9.69$, $p < .003$) and on overall attitudinal scores (female $M_{[adj]} = 129.33$, male $M_{[adj]} = 121.08$; $F[1,58] = 4.57$, $p < .04$). No significant main nor interaction effects were found for the listening, speaking, and writing subareas.

Discussion

The most important finding of this study was that the treatment group students in the upper grades had improved their self-perceptions as learners by the end of the treatment period. This finding is important for several reasons. First, it points out that students in the upper, elementary grades who are having difficulties in reading respond positively to appropriate intervention strategies. Since research has shown that as students with reading problems progress through school it becomes increasingly difficult to improve reading attitudes and negative self-perceptions (Bond, Tinker, Wasson, & Wasson, 1989; Butkowsky & Willows, 1980; Dweck & Bempechat, 1983; Lipson & Wixson, 1991; Neal & Proshek, 1967; Paris, Olson, & Stevenson, 1983; Tunnell, Calder, & Phaup, 1992), this finding points out the importance of implementing intervention strategies for students who are performing below grade level in reading while they are in the elementary grades.

Also, this finding is important because it is supported by the work of other researchers who have found a relationship between self-concept and attitude development (Alexander & Filler, 1976; Groff, 1962; Midkiff, Burke, Hunt, & Ellison, 1986; Scott & Miller, 1986). Also, the importance of positive self-perceptions to academic and social performance has been documented (Chapman, Silva, & Williams, 1984; Eldridge, 1981; Herbert, 1968; Prendergast & Binder, 1975; Stevens, 1971; Wattenberg & Clifford, 1966). Collectively, these research findings point out the need for investigation of the nature of the relationship between self-perceptions and attitudes about learning, because it is not known whether effective intervention first improves students' self-perceptions, then their attitudes, and then their

performance, or whether improvement in these areas progresses in some other order, or whether there is simultaneous improvement in the areas.

A third reason that this finding is important is because the improvement in students' attitudes about themselves as learners took place in a relatively short period of time, approximately 12 weeks. This is remarkable, considering that the position generally held by attitude theorists (Ajzen, & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Liska, 1984; Schlegel & DiTecco, 1982) is that attitudes are not altered quickly. Whether the positive changes in students' attitudes will remain stable over time, assuming they continue to experience success in school-based language arts activities, will likely depend on many factors (e.g., school environment, home environment, parental attitudes, teacher attitudes, gender, socio-economic factors, etc.).

The female students' overall attitudes (as indicated in total SAI scores) as well as their attitudes toward reading were significantly more positive than were the attitudes of the male students. This finding is consistent with the results reported by Askov and Fishback (1973) who found female students have better attitudes toward reading. More research is needed to determine why male and female students differ in their attitudes toward reading. No significant group effects nor group-by-gender interaction effects were found, indicating no differences in the effects of the instructional approaches for male and female students.

It is not clear why students' attitudes toward listening, speaking, and writing activities were not significantly affected by the intervention strategy. It may be that attitudes toward listening, speaking, and writing activities take longer to change and that the treatment period was not long

enough; or, it may be that the intervention lessons included more opportunities for students to engage in reading activities than opportunities for them to engage in listening, speaking, and writing activities, causing them feel more successful in reading activities. Future studies should be structured to determine those factors which may be associated with improvement in attitudes toward activities involving each of the language arts areas.

In summary, the findings of the study offer support for individualized instruction which includes the use of trade books related to students' interests in an integrated language arts approach. It appears that such an approach positively influences the attitudes of poor readers in the lower, elementary grades toward themselves as learners, perhaps preventing the development of additional learning problems. The extent to which such an approach may be used to improve attitudes of poor readers toward each of the language arts areas is not clear. Reading was the only language arts area toward which attitudes improved, among female students only, suggesting that female students' attitudes may be more receptive to improvement than are male students regardless of the instructional approach used. Future studies should be designed to explore the questions raised by the findings of this study.

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